



SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION

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AFFILIATED WITH AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION

South Australian Secondary Principal's Association submission to Senate Inquiry into NAPLAN testing.

We thank you for this opportunity to present a considered submission about the impact of NAPLAN in schools over the period of its operation since 2008. This submission represents the perspectives of leaders of secondary schools in South Australia.

This response will focus especially on the terms of reference:

- a) Whether the evidence suggests that NAPLAN is achieving its stated objectives
- e) Potential improvements to the program, to improve student learning and assessment.

NAPLAN was introduced in 2008 with the following stated purposes:

The National Assessment Program (NAP) is the measure through which governments, education authorities, schools and the community can determine whether or not young Australians are meeting important educational outcomes.

Two benefits of the NAP are to help drive improvements in student outcomes and provide increased accountability for the community.

(www.nap.edu.au/about/why-nap.html accessed 20/6/2013)

Over this period of time, Australia has fallen significantly behind other countries in education performance as measured through a comparable test – PISA

(www.grattan.edu.au/static/files/assets/23afab6b/129_report_learning_from_the_best_main.pdf accessed 20/6/2013)

Further, it is reported that in South Australia \$170 million in funding has been provided to schools for programs to raise literacy and numeracy levels over the period when NAPLAN results have been declining.

("Funds fail to close South Australia's literacy gap"

www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/education/funds-fail-to-close-south-australias-literacy-gap/story-fn3o6nna-1226596001173 accessed 20/6/2013)

Evidence such as this suggests that NAPLAN is not being effective in delivering on its fundamental purpose of providing a measure through which governments, education authorities, schools and the community can drive improvements in student outcomes.

The school leaders we represent are very clear in the concerns they have about the effectiveness of NAPLAN at the school level:

- The time lapse between the administration of the NAPLAN tests and the provision of the feedback to schools makes it very difficult to have students see a connection between their testing experience and their results
- The feedback relates to the NAPLAN skills sets and this does not necessarily relate to the learning priorities of the students
- The NAPLAN tests and feedback are not related to the ongoing teaching and learning programs of schools.

It must be noted that the Australian Curriculum has been implemented since the beginning of the NAPLAN program. The Australian Curriculum will be fully implemented in South Australian schools up to year 9 level by 2014.

In this context leaders in secondary schools are very clear about the preferred model for an assessment and reporting program that would provide accountability and drive improvement in student learning:

- Assessment must be connected to the ongoing teaching and learning program in the school, i.e. the Australian Curriculum
- Assessment must be connected to the established standards embedded in the curriculum, i.e. subject achievement standards
- Assessment must value teachers' professional judgements of student performance in the ongoing context of teaching and learning.

We also believe that any accountability program that is meant to have a focus on “the knowledge, skills, understandings and values for productive and rewarding citizenship” as is stated for NAPLAN should now do this in conjunction with the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.

In proposing these key points for building an improved assessment, reporting and accountability regime SASPA would like to emphasise the following points. We note that ACARA in its submission to this inquiry outlines its proposal for a national online testing program relating the subjects of the Australian Curriculum. We do not support the implementation of a testing regime that is an external imposition on schools and teachers.

We strongly believe that building a program of assessment, reporting and accountability based on the three key points mentioned above would lay the foundations for quality improvement in line with the best practice models of Finland, Singapore and Shanghai as mentioned in the Grattan Institute Report <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/>